(ii) The allocation of foodgrains for the BPL category was doubled from 10 kg. to 20 kg. w.e.f. 1.4.2000 which has been further raised to 25 kg. per family per month.

(iii) To ensure smooth flow of PDS commodities especially in rural, remote, hilly and tribal areas, financial assistance is provided under Centrally Sponsored Schemes 'Construction of Godowns' and 'Purchase of Vans'.

(iv) The States / UTs have been asked to actively involve the Gram Sabhas/ Panchayats in the task of identification ofAntyodaya beneficiaries.

(c) Under TPDS, there is no scheme to give free foodgrains to BPL population. However, the Annapurna Scheme which was launched with effect from April, 2000 aims at providing foodgrains to those senior citizens of 65 years of age or above who, though eligible, have remained uncovered under the National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS), 10 kg. of foodgrains per head per month free of cost.

Increase in prices of essential commodities

4140. PROF. M.M. AGARWAL: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there has been considerable increase in the prices of essential commodities in the country during the last one year and till date;

(b) if so, what are the specific reasons therefor and the percentage of increase in various essential commodities in the country; and

(c) the details of steps taken or proposed to be taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI V. SREENIVASA PRASAD) : (a) and (b) The prices of most of the essential commodities, barring edible oils and vegetables like potato and onion, indicated a steady to declining trend during last one year. Increase in the cost of import of edible oils and lean supply season for vegetables resulted in the increase in prices. Percentage variations in the

Wholesale Price Index (WPI) numbers in respect of 12 essential commodities during the last one year ending 11.8.2001 are given below:

Commodity	% Variation (11.8.2001 /12.8.2000)
Rice	0.8
Wheat	0.5
Gram	26.5
Arhar	-1.4
Sugar	-6.4
Vanaspati	6.8
Mustard oil	10.9
Groundnut oil	8.1
Tea	2.8
Potato	99.4
Onion	32.4
Salt	-8.0

(c) Government constantly maintain a close watch on the prices and availability of essential commodities in the country. Apart from certain long-term measures for augmenting the production of essential commodities in the country, imports of items like pulses and edible oils are allowed under OGL to augment their availability. Expoerts of onion are regulated through quantitative restrictions. After reviewing the recent increase in the prices of onion, Government have suspended the exports of onion for a period of one month from August, 7, 2001, to protect the interest of the consumers. Essential commodities like rice, wheat, sugar and kerosene are also being supplied through the outlets of Public Distribution System at below market prices. Stringent actions are taken against hoarders, black marketeers and others indulging in unfair trade practices under the Essential Commodities Act and Prevention of Black Marketing and Maintenance of Supplies of Essential Commodities Act by the State/UT Governments.